

2014 Trooper of the Year Ceremony

Telecommunications Nominees:

Trooper of the Year

Troop One: Senior Trooper Matthew O. Southern

S/Tpr. Southern began his career in law enforcement with the Richland County Sheriff's Office. Eight years later, he became a Trooper with the Highway Patrol in January 2010. During his time with the Highway Patrol he has been instrumental in serving his community. He has become a strongest advocate for The Special Olympics. S/Tpr. Southern selflessly dedicates many hours, both on duty and off duty, fundraising for The Special Olympics. In 2014, S/Trp. Southern arrested had high activity, including the arrest of 11 drunk drivers, all while investigating collisions in a very thorough manner. S/Tpr. Southern completes all administrative work efficiently and submits it in a timely manner. When S/Tpr. Southern is off duty, he works as a driving instructor for a private driving school and reads to students at Camden Elementary and conducts safety presentation at the Lugoff Fire Department.

Troop Two: Corporal Jordan N. Sinclair

Cpl. Sinclair is assigned to Troop Two Post A, Newberry and Laurens Counties. He is a dedicated and professional employee. On April 3, 2014, while on routine patrol and traveling west on I-26 in Newberry County, Cpl. Sinclair observed a mini-van entering the Eastbound Rest Area at a very slow rate of speed. He recalled that Communications had given a broadcast for a Kia with a Tennessee vehicle registration, which was wanted in connection with a homicide that had occurred earlier in Tennessee. Cpl. Sinclair verified by the vehicle tag that this was the wanted vehicle given in the BOLO.

Cpl. Sinclair requested Communications notify Newberry County Sheriff's Office for assistance, to initiate a traffic stop on this vehicle. Minutes later, the mini-van pulled left the Rest Area and began traveling east on I-26 and then onto secondary roads. Cpl. Sinclair followed the vehicle while waiting for assistance from the Sheriff's Office before attempting to initiate a felony traffic

stop. Newberry deputies deployed “Stop Sticks,” which were successful in disabling the mini-van. The occupants exited the mini-van and fled on foot into the woods, leaving a number of weapons in the vehicle. After an all-day manhunt, the suspects were apprehended and taken into custody. During the manhunt, law enforcement learned that one of the juveniles had murdered his father and had made statements that he was going to Florida to kill another family member.

Troop Three: Lance Corporal Joseph B. Stewart

On June 13, 2014, L/Cpl. J.B. Stewart was on I-85 South when he observed a vehicle following a box truck too closely and driving erratically. L/Cpl. Stewart stopped the vehicle and started talking to the passenger. She stated she had anxiety and trouble breathing and said it was urgent so the driver was taking her to the hospital. L/Cpl. Stewart offered to call an ambulance for her and she stated that would be ok. EMS was called. L/Cpl. Stewart smelled alcohol when he approached the vehicle. He came back to the car and spoke to the driver who gave him his name. There was no match found when the trooper checked with Telecommunications. L/Cpl. Stewart performed several DUI tests on the suspect, which he failed; so, he was placed under arrest. The suspect was booked for DUI, no SCDL and Open Container. L/Cpl. Stewart left the jail and was called back about 30 minutes later. Further investigation revealed the suspect had an active felony warrant from Dekalb County, Georgia. He was wanted for murder and aggravated assault. He also had a bench warrant in Spartanburg County. L/Cpl. Stewart is credited with getting a murder suspect into custody.

Troop Four: Lance Corporal Michael J. Shank

L/Cpl. Shank is a dedicated worker with a passion for removing impaired drivers from our roadways. He led Troop 4 in DUI arrests in 2014, as he has done for several years since he has been with the Highway Patrol. On July 22, 2014, L/Cpl. Shank witnessed a black Ford making an improper U-turn in York County. L/Cpl. Shank noticed that the driver was not wearing her seat belt.

After stopping the vehicle, L/Cpl. Shank noticed the driver had blood on her face and hands and she stated that she had tried to kill herself. She had several cuts all over her body. L/Cpl. Shank called dispatch for an ambulance due to the heavy bleeding and the mental status of the driver.

The paramedics arrived and transported her to the hospital. The forensic team from the York County Sheriff's Office came to investigate to rule out foul play. While looking in the vehicle, they found a typed suicide note in the passenger's side seat. L/Cpl. Shank's actions that day were truly lifesaving.

Troop Five: Lance Corporal Jimmy B. King

In March of 2014, L/Cpl. J.B. King responded to a fatal collision in Dillon County where the driver's mother was a passenger and was killed in the collision. Upon L/Cpl. King's investigation, he found out the driver was driving under the influence and had been drinking moonshine. While questioning the driver L/Cpl. King discovered where the driver got the moonshine and was able to stop some individuals who purchased the illegal liquor as they left the suspected residence. L/Cpl. King then used that information to assist the Dillon County Sheriff's Office with obtaining a search warrant. At the residence, L/Cpl. King and officers from the Dillon County Sheriff's Office located a still, a quantity of illegal liquor, and some marijuana plants, both growing and harvested. The subject was also a felon in possession of a firearm.

Troop Six: Trooper Travis L. Clemens

On July 21, 2014 at about 3 a.m., Trooper Clemens was dispatched to a collision with injuries on I-95. Trooper Clemens was the first emergency service unit to respond to the scene. When Trooper Clemens arrived, he saw a vehicle fully engulfed in flames and overturned in the wooded median. Trooper Clemens attempted to extinguish the flames, but the fire was too involved and he was not able to contain it. Trooper Clemens put himself in harm's way and was dangerously close to the burning vehicle. He saw two bodies lying on the ground close to the burning vehicle and carried one victim over his shoulder to safety. By this time, a US Army soldier had stopped to assist Trooper Clemens; both of them were able to pull the second victim away from the burning vehicle and out of harm's way. Trooper Clemens, still remaining calm, noticed a third victim on the left side of the vehicle. This was one of the passengers that had crawled a short distance away from the burning vehicle. Trooper Clemens provided aide until the Fire and Rescue Personnel arrived.

Troop Seven AND OVERALL STATEWIDE WINNER: Corporal Antonio M. Brown

Corporal Brown, a native of Bamberg, was promoted to Corporal in 2013 and currently serves the Orangeburg/Calhoun Post. In February of 2014, at approximately 6:22 p.m., Corporal Brown received a BOLO from the Blythewood Telecommunications Center regarding a female subject who had been kidnapped from Virginia and was supposed to be in the trunk of a green 1996 Cadillac. At approximately 6:31 p.m., while traveling north on Interstate 95, Corporal Brown observed the vehicle in question parked in the southbound rest area. After requesting back-up, Corporal Brown and Trooper Askins approached the vehicle and ordered the driver and only occupant from the vehicle to the ground. As the subject was being ordered from the vehicle, he used the keyless remote to open the trunk where a female was located. The female was later identified as the mother/victim of the driver. The mother said to the troopers she had been placed in the trunk by her son in Virginia around 9 a.m. with intentions of being taken to Florida against her will. Corporal Brown requested that EMS respond to the scene to examine the mother, who had been locked in the trunk of the vehicle for several hours. After arriving, EMTs transported the victim to the Orangeburg Regional Hospital for further observation and treatment. When recognizing him for Overall Trooper of the Year, Col. Oliver also mentioned an incident that occurred this year when Brown made the decision to relay a young man to MUSC for a kidney transplant. The young man's parents' vehicle had broken down on I-95. Brown and another trooper helped get the family to the hospital for a life-saving kidney transplant with just minutes to spare. Col. Oliver said that it was this sort of judgment, coupled with the 2014 incident, that set Brown apart.

Troop Eight: Sergeant Christian P. Logdon

Sgt. Logdon always gives the extra effort, sacrifice, and selfless service to his co-workers, the entire Highway Patrol and the motoring public. He has a true passion for removing drug trafficking and illegal activity from our roadways. He is a multi-tasker, who is often called upon at the last minute, to assist with a drug seizure or compile statistics for the command staff. In addition to managing administrative operations for the Region I SIT Team and Region I Motors, he supervises the entire Interdiction and Canine Units and serves as the Department's Canine

Coordinator, as well as taking care of his own Patrol-issued canine. He was recently chosen by the Troop Eight Command Staff to attend a 12 week K-9 Instructor School in Front Royal, VA, which is taught by the U.S. Customs and Border Protection division.

Troop Nine: Lance Corporal Tyler J. Luther

L/Cpl. Luther has been a state trooper for 15 years and has been assigned to Troop Nine since 2011. L/Cpl. Luther has actively increased his knowledge, skills and abilities in collision reconstruction and has been recognized as a tenacious criminal investigator. In January 2014, a Solicitor's Office requested Troop Nine's assistance with an ongoing high profile investigation. The request was to analyze a poor quality nighttime video and determine what type of vehicle was depicted in the video. L/Cpl. Luther dissected the video and ultimately identified the year, make and model of the vehicle in the video. Armed with this information, arrests were made for multiple charges including kidnapping and murder. Another instance of L/Cpl. Luther's dedication to duty occurred in June 2014 when Luther responded to a fatal hit-and-run collision involving a pedestrian. Upon arrival at the collision scene, L/Cpl. Luther quickly evaluated the situation and almost immediately determined that the pedestrian was lying in the roadway when struck by the unknown vehicle. As with many vehicle/pedestrian collisions, there was very little evidence available. Armed with a few pieces of evidence and a determination to solve this complicated case, L/Cpl. Luther traveled to the Upstate and matched what little evidence he had from the scene to the vehicle of interest. A DNA analysis later confirmed the vehicle of interest did in fact strike and kill the pedestrian.

Troop Ten: Insurance Enforcement Lance Corporal John W. Valdario, Sr.

L/Cpl. John W. Valdario, Sr., joined the South Carolina Highway Patrol in 1970 after serving four years in the United States Air Force. Assigned to Lexington County, L/Cpl. Valdario remained in what was then District One where he was promoted through the ranks of Corporal, Sergeant, First Sergeant and Lieutenant. Upon his promotion to Major, he transferred to the State Transport Police. He retired from South Carolina Department of Public Safety in December 2001. In 2003, L/Cpl. Valdario rejoined South Carolina's Highway Patrol with the Insurance Enforcement Unit, where he is assigned to the Lexington area. In June of 2014, L/Cpl. Valdario observed a suspicious vehicle parked adjacent to a rental property. He approached a subject

coming from the rear of the house and inquired as to why the subject was there. The subject stated that he lived at that address but then sped away in a vehicle. Valdario followed the vehicle for several miles before the suspect's vehicle crashed. An investigation revealed that the driver and his female passenger were wanted in two counties on various charges. They were both apprehended and brought to justice.

Troop Eleven Training: Corporal Rupert B. Pope

Corporal R.B. Pope has been a member of the South Carolina Highway Patrol since July 1997, and a member of the Training Unit since May 2013. Cpl. Pope holds instructor certifications in Firearms, Patrol Rifle, Precision Rifle, and is also a member of the A-CERT, Honor Guard and SCHP Pistol Team. Cpl. Pope has excelled in all facets of firearms use and instruction. Much of his success as an instructor evolved from the experience he has received as a member of the Pistol Team. Cpl. Pope has been a member of the SCHP Pistol Team since 2006, competing in pistol competitions against some of the best shooters in the nation at all levels of competition, including the National Police Shooting Championships. All of this knowledge has been two-fold for Cpl. Pope. First, it has increased his awareness and competence in various weapons systems, and it has allowed him to expand his instructional capacity and convey this knowledge to other troopers. Cpl. Pope's selfless service and dedication have earned him an honor not given to a South Carolina trooper since 1993. Cpl. Pope was awarded the Distinguished Semi-Automatic Pistol Badge from the NRA for excellence in competition, placing him in a class of his own.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS OPERATOR OF THE YEAR

Blythewood TCC: TCO: Elizabeth M. Childers

Ms. Childers is a native of Winnsboro, South Carolina in Fairfield County. She has been employed with the Blythewood Telecommunications Center since September 2013. Since then, TCO Childers has proved to be a quick learner, a capable operator and professional telecommunicator. TCO Childers is also very reliable and dependable. Whenever there is a need for extra coverage in the center, she readily makes herself available and is always willing to come into work on her days off to provide support for her co-workers and help cover the radios. TCO Childers comes to work with a cheerful attitude and works well with her co-workers.

Charleston TCC: TCO Helene R. West

Ms. West has been employed with SCHP Telecommunications Unit since August of 1990. Ms. West started with Orangeburg TCC before transferring to Charleston TCC. During her 20 plus year career with the Highway Patrol Telecommunications Unit, TCO West has always been a team player. She often comes in to help when an operator is out or when an additional person is needed to cover a shift. TCO West gets along well with all her co-workers, and she is always willing to assist other operators in any way she can. When interacting with her co-workers and when performing her duties, TCO West consistently exhibits a respectful and professional attitude and demeanor.

Florence TCC AND OVERALL WINNER FOR TELECOMMUNICATIONS OPERATOR OF THE YEAR: TCO Anthony Witherspoon

Employed with SCDPS for 10 years, Mr. Witherspoon has been a telecommunications operator in the Florence TCC since October 2013 after transferring from the Blythewood TCC. TCO Witherspoon demonstrates professionalism in all aspects of the job: radio communications, telephone etiquette, written documentation, CAD protocol, personal demeanor, and standard operating procedures. On March 21, 2014, TCO Witherspoon was working the Darlington/Marlboro radio when a Darlington trooper was attempting to make a traffic stop on a vehicle and the vehicle fled from the trooper. Witherspoon exceeded in productivity with the Computer Aided Dispatch by packing notes into the CAD record making sure that all information documented the traffic stop from start to finish. It turned out the subject was wanted out of Florida. Witherspoon's handling of this situation shows the skills needed by all telecommunications operators when it comes to officer safety, job stress, multi-tasking, and the ability to perform responsibly.

Greenville TCC: Assistant Telecommunications Supervisor C. Keith Sonefelt

On April 3, 2014 at about 3:40 a.m., North Carolina Highway Patrol called on the regional radio and gave a BOLO regarding a silver Kia with four subjects in it. NCHP advised that the vehicle and all four subjects were suspects in a homicide in Greene County, TN. They advised that all suspects were possibly armed and dangerous and possibly heading to Florida. ATCS Sonefelt

took the information and gave it to the Spartanburg operator, who immediately BOLOED it to Spartanburg units. ATCS Sonefelt decided to call the Greenwood TCC and pass the information on to them so they could have their units BOLO as well. About 30 minutes after contacting the Greenwood TCC, one of the Greenwood operators called back into the Greenville TCC and advised ATCS Sonefelt they had a unit that spotted the suspect vehicle in the East Bound Rest Area on I-26. She advised that when the vehicle left the rest area they were going to attempt to stop the vehicle. The suspect vehicle did not stop until running over stop sticks and the suspects ran into the woods. After a manhunt that ended approximately 10 hours later, all four suspects were taken into custody without incident. The forward thinking actions of ATCS Sonefelt helped lead to the capture of these suspects.

SPECIALTY AWARDS

The Director's Hero Award is awarded to a member of the Department for extraordinary courage and voluntary risk of life in performing an act resulting in direct benefits to the department or the State. There were two recipients:

Trooper James B. "Hunter" Ruff – TROOP TWO

Trooper James Ruff joined the Highway Patrol in July 2013. He is assigned to Troop 2, Greenville/Abbeville. On November 28, 2014, while on routine patrol, Trooper Ruff was monitoring the Abbeville 911 radio frequencies and heard emergency personnel being dispatched to a house fire. Dispatchers told first responders the burning house possibly had entrapment. Realizing he was close to the burning home in Honea Path, Trooper Ruff responded and was the first emergency personnel to arrive on scene. Trooper Ruff entered the burning house and came across an elderly gentleman who was attempting to gather his World War II medals. Trooper Ruff assisted the man from the burning house to a safe area. Once fire fighters arrived, Trooper Ruff stayed on scene to help direct traffic. Chief James Alewine of the local Fire Department arrived on scene to battle the blazing house fire and encountered the trooper. He commented that the man could have been overcome by the smoke and heat if not for the quick actions of Trooper Ruff. Chief Alewine added that Trooper Ruff went above and beyond the call of duty. Trooper Ruff is a native of Anderson and now lives in Abbeville with his wife and 2-year-old son.

Trooper Travis L. Clemens, TROOP SIX

On July 21, 2014 at about 3 a.m., Trooper Clemens was dispatched to a collision with injuries on I-95. Trooper Clemens was the first emergency service unit to respond to the scene. When Trooper Clemens arrived, he saw a vehicle fully engulfed in flames and overturned in the wooded median. Trooper Clemens attempted to extinguish the flames, but the fire was too involved and he was not able to contain it. Trooper Clemens put himself in harm's way and was dangerously close to the burning vehicle. He saw two bodies lying on the ground close to the burning vehicle and carried one victim over his shoulder to safety. By this time, a US Army soldier had stopped to assist Trooper Clemens; both of them were able to pull the second victim away from the burning vehicle and out of harm's way. Trooper Clemens, still remaining calm, noticed a third victim on the left side of the vehicle. This was one of the passengers that had crawled a short distance away from the burning vehicle. Trooper Clemens provided aide until the Fire and Rescue Personnel arrived.

The Medal of Valor is awarded only to sworn members of SCDPS in exceptional cases where hazardous duty was performed by a member who displayed outstanding bravery, gallantry, or courage in the advancement of basic law enforcement purposes by protection of life or property, enforcement of laws, preservation of public peace, prevention of criminal acts or apprehension of criminals. Additionally, the act was of such an extraordinary nature that the member was exposed to great peril or personal danger and acted above and beyond the call of duty.

Lance Corporal William C. Harman of Troop 5, Horry County is our Medal of Valor recipient

On September 16, 2014, a BOLO was dispatched from the Florence TCO of a vehicle fleeing from North Carolina law enforcement officers on US-17 entering Horry County. North Carolina law enforcement attempted to serve assault warrants on Howard Henry Smith in Holden Beach, North Carolina, when Smith fled from law enforcement in his pickup truck. During the pursuit, Smith fired at officers on several occasions using an assault rifle. When the pursuit entered South Carolina, L/Cpl. Harman became the lead in the pursuit. As L/Cpl. Harman attempted to get close to the suspect's vehicle, the suspect fired a handgun out of the back glass of the pickup

truck at L/Cpl. Harman. The Officer then backed off for a short period of time before again approaching the suspect's vehicle, and after receiving the order to disable the vehicle, L/Cpl. Harman's Patrol vehicle made contact with the suspect's truck, causing the suspect's vehicle to become disabled. Smith was then arrested without incident. L/Cpl. Harman is a native of Columbia and now lives in Bluffton with this wife. He's active in the Lowcountry Community Church where he's on the worship team.